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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the creation, implementation, and evaluation of a nine-credit experimental, inter-campus, interdisciplinary learning community course entitled, "The Fundamental Values of a Good Community," developed at the University of Hawaii, West Oahu (UHWO), and Leeward Community College (LCC), two institutions in the University of Hawaii system. The course focuses on three general education skills--critical thinking, oral communication, and written communication--and is designed to provide a bridge between lower division LCC students and upper-division (UHWO) students, ideally as a culminating educational experience for LCC students and a beginning educational experience of UHWO students. The course is organized around five major subtopics: meaning of community; structure of community; moral foundations; subcultures, marginalized, and invisible communities; and the individual. LCC students who satisfactorily complete the course receive three credits each in history, American studies, and philosophy, and satisfy one writing-intensive course requirement; UHWO students receive three credits each for electives in humanities, professional studies, and social sciences, and receive waivers for a required writing course and a public administration skills course. Evaluation of the learning experience is done on several levels--faculty evaluate students, students assess both faculty and the course, and faculty evaluate each other as well as the course. Overall, faculty and student evaluations of the learning community experience have been favorable. Appended are lists of skills standards and a course schedule.(CH)

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An Intercampus Learning Community:

"The Fundamental Values of a Good Community"

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Paper Presented at the 8th Annual National Conference
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An Inter-Campus Learning Community
"The Fundamental Values of a Good Community"

Since Fall 1997, the University of Hawaii - West Oahu (UHWO) and Leeward Community College (LCC), two institutions in the University of Hawaii system, have cooperated to develop and deliver a nine-credit learning community entitled "The Fundamental Values of a Good Community." This experimental bridge course between lower- and upper-division academic programs has served to strengthen community among the faculty and students of the two campuses. This paper focuses on the collaborative efforts involved in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of this innovative, complex learning community.

BACKGROUND

UHWO is a two-year, upper-division, baccalaureate degree-granting institution that first began offering classes in January 1976. It currently has a student body of approximately 700 students, including students enrolled in alternative delivery classes on the neighbor islands. Twenty-three full-time faculty staff three academic divisions--Humanities, Professional Studies, and Social Sciences.

LCC is a two-year, lower-division institution with approximately 5,500 students and 146 full-time faculty. LCC's academic program is housed in six divisions--Arts and Humanities, Business Education, Language Arts, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Vocational-Technical Training.

UHWO and LCC are neighbors. UHWO has been operating since 1981 from portable buildings on LCC's campus; however, relations between the two institutions have been uneasy. Since it is likely that the two institutions will continue to be neighbors for at least another ten years, administrators and faculty in the past few years decided to build closer ties between UHWO and LCC and to combine resources to develop a solid four-year educational experience for the students of both campuses. "The Fundamental Values of a Good Community" has been the most important method of inter-campus collaboration.

The idea for the learning community was borne out of a system-wide General Education Project to reform the general education experience of undergraduates in the University of Hawaii's multi-campus system. From 1995 to 1997 a system-wide committee developed and refined a set of five general education skills standards, which were approved by all the faculty senates in the ten-campus system: critical thinking, information retrieval and technology, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, and written communication. In Spring 1997, the office of the President of the University of Hawaii also made available Educational Improvement Funds (EIF) that were specifically targeted for projects to reform and improve the UH general education experience.

In applying for an EIF grant, UHWO and LCC faculty proposed an inter-campus, inter-disciplinary learning community that would focus on three of the five endorsed general education skills standards--critical thinking, oral communication, and written communication. (See Appendix A for a list of the specific skill standards.) The UHWO and LCC proposal, "The Fundamental Values of a Good

Community: A Cross-disciplinary Curriculum Development Project," was ranked number one out of forty system-wide proposals and awarded $18,314 to be used for faculty release time the first time the learning community course was offered in Fall 1997. In addition, the project was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant of $24,947, which was used for summer stipends for the faculty to prepare the learning community course, as well as for honoraria for guest speakers and money for field trips.

THE PARTICIPANTS

In Summer and Fall of 1997, six faculty members were involved in preparing and teaching the interdisciplinary learning community, "The Fundamental Values of a Good Community." The UHWO faculty were Dr. Rebecca Lee, (Project Director) Associate Professor of English and Director of the UHWO Writing Program; Dr. Linda Nishigaya, Professor of Sociology; and Dr. Ross Prizzia, Professor of Public Administration. The LCC faculty were Patricia Kennedy, Assistant Professor of History; Donald Thomson, Professor of Sociology and American Studies; and Dr. Gailynn Williamson, Instructor of Philosophy. Of these faculty (four women and two men) four are Caucasian, one is Japanese American, and one is Native Hawaiian.

The students enrolled in the learning community have also come from diverse backgrounds. Two-thirds have been women, with an average age of 29 years. On average, the ethnicity of the students has been 17.5% Japanese, 16% Caucasian, 16% Filipino, 16% Mixed/Other Asian, 15.5% Native Hawaiian, 8.5% Mixed, 8.5% Hispanic, and 2% African American. Thirty-eight percent of the students have

been in Social Sciences, 29% in Professional Studies, 24 % in Liberal Arts, and 9% in Humanities.

THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE COURSE

The intent of this particular nine-credit learning community is to provide a bridge course between lower-division LCC students and upper-division UHWO students. Ideally it is meant to be a culminating educational experience for LCC students and a beginning educational experience for UHWO students. LCC students who satisfactorily complete this course receive three credits each in History, American Studies, and Philosophy, as well as satisfy one writing-intensive course requirement. UHWO students receive three credits each of electives in the Humanities, Professional Studies, and Social Sciences, as well as a waiver of the UHWO required writing course and a waiver of a Public Administration skills course requirement.

The content and structure of the learning community provide a framework for the six faculty to contribute their disciplinary expertise. The learning community meets two days a week for three one hour and fifteen minute class sessions, with lunch breaks in between. At least two faculty members are assigned for each class session and often more of all the faculty members are present for a class session, depending on the activity scheduled. For example, all faculty attend guest lecturers' presentations, participate in grading student oral presentations, or take part in specially planned class discussions or forums on a particular topic. (See Appendix B for samples of daily faculty schedules.)

The texts for the learning community have included Amitai Etzioni's *The Spirit of Community,* Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* and a multi-cultural anthology entitled *New Worlds of Literature*. In addition, participating faculty have compiled a Class Anthology with essays in History, Philosophy, Public Administration, and Sociology. All of the texts relate in some way to the general topic of community and/or to the specific subtopics identified for study.

Five major sub-topics organize the course. The sub-topics are "The Meaning of Community," which examines the definitions of community; "The Structure of Communities," which investigates how the various disciplines discuss the concept of community structure; "Moral Foundations of Community," which examines the underlying norms and values of communities; "Subcultures, Marginalized, and Invisible Communities," which looks at communities outside mainstream society; and "The Individual," which explores the relationship between the individual and the community.

Assignments for the learning community are especially designed to develop and strengthen critical thinking, oral, and written skills while also covering various aspects of community from inter-disciplinary and multi-cultural perspectives. The assignments include oral and written work, as well as individual and group work. They include journal writing on topics related to those covered in readings, lectures, or guest presentations; a four- to five-page paper explaining the significance of a community; a five-minute individual oral presentation on the structure of a community, describing its make-up, and evaluating its efficiency and effectiveness; a mid-term examination comprised of multiple choice questions, an essay, and oral

responses to short questions; a group oral presentation covering the history, structure, functions, and viability of a specific community; a ten- to twelve-page research paper with a topic chosen from the student's area of academic specialization and written in the style and format appropriate to that discipline; and a final examination comprised of short written essays and an oral report on the research project.

An integral part of the learning community is the scholars invited to give presentations on topics directly related to issues covered in the course. During the first semester the learning community was offered, five guest speakers shared their expertise with the class. First, a philosopher from UH - Manoa spoke about the conflicts between conventional and non-conventional communities, such as cults. Next, a China specialist, also from UH – Manoa, covered the Confucian ideas of community, focusing on the importance of relationships. An historian/anthropologist from LCC, an activist in Native Hawaiian affairs, encapsulated the history of the origins and development of Native Hawaiian communities. An organizer from the local community, an employee of a major local labor union, described the organizational and human aspects of organizing for protest. And the final speaker, a poet/essayist who was the Visiting Writer at UH – Manoa, explained how the creative artist, as an individual, both reflected and questioned community values. Each of the guest speaker's presentation was videotaped for future use.

CREATING COMMUNITY: GROUP WORK and OTHER ACTIVITIES

The learning community has provided a wonderful opportunity for students to bond—a rewarding by-product of the class. Group work on class assignments involves collaborative teaching-learning techniques that create a growing sense of community among students. For example, very early in the semester, students are assigned to groups to work on their first short paper assignment. The students help each other in the entire process, from deciding on a topic to polishing the finished product. A similar group process is used in preparing the disciplined-based research paper.

Students also work in groups to put together their oral presentations, especially the group oral presentations, which have been the highlights of the class. By this point in the course, the students are well integrated and organized and have a strong sense of camaraderie. As a result, the presentations have been well research, organized, and highly creative. Some presentations have been like choreographed plays, replete with costumes and music.

Other ways of creating a sense of community among the students have been less structured. At the beginning of the semester, a phone and e-mail list of class members is provided to students, who use the list to contact each other and organize various group activities. For instance, students have organized their own study groups, which have become a mainstay throughout the semester and beyond. Students have also used the phone lists to socialize and support each other. On one particular field trip, for example, students were coming by cars from various directions and locations to visit a native Hawaiian farm when a fatal automobile

accident closed the highway for several hours and caused a massive traffic jam, with police directing cars away from the accident site. Students communicated with each other through cell phones. As a result, despite the long delays, all the cars made it to the farm.

Students have also organized themselves around food. Although faculty provide refreshments during the first week of classes, thereafter students take turns providing food and beverages for the breaks between class periods. These intervals are a way for the students to socialize and get to know one another. In addition, students meet for group lunches, which can be a time for study or socializing.

Students have created community among themselves through other means as well. For instance, at the end of the first semester of the learning community, students gave the faculty a scrapbook containing photographs and comments from each student. Students have also organized themselves to take a group photograph to be presented to the faculty. In addition, they have put a student skit and organized a karaoke party for themselves at the end of the semester.

Faculty are often an intrinsic part of this community. For example, faculty members take part as mentors and resource persons in group work activities. Every time a peer group is formed for editing of individual papers, a faculty member is assigned to work with a certain group. Faculty members also are assigned as advisors to the group oral projects. In addition to verbal instructions and comments, faculty provide written guidelines to help students with writing and editing their papers and oral projects. Faculty also organize and accompany

students on field trips and engage in the planned and spontaneous social activities of the class.

The learning community has provided an excellent opportunity for faculty to form community among themselves as well. Faculty members spend numerous hours together planning the syllabus, planning individual segments of the course, grading papers, and discussing issues that may arise. Such group work is often conducted over lunch since faculty discovered that luncheon meetings are an effective way of getting the work done and interacting informally.

EVALUATION

Evaluations of the learning community experience is done on several levels. Faculty evaluate students throughout the course. In addition, students assess the faculty and the course. And faculty evaluate each other, as well as the course.

Student Evaluations

Faculty evaluate the students collaboratively, using a 120 point system, with students accumulating points for their performance on the written and oral assignments, examinations, and class participation. Each faculty member evaluates a student's written work, and the average grade of all six faculty members is the grade assigned to that work. When there are considerable differences in assessments, discussion ensues and a compromise grade is given. The students' papers are then divided among the faculty for written comments before being returned to the students.

The evaluation process is similar for oral presentations. Each faculty member uses a categorized form to assess each student's oral presentation. After all the

presentations, faculty meet to average their assigned grades, with the average grade given to the oral presentation. For the group oral presentation, both an individual and group grade are components of the assigned grade.

For the mid-term and final examinations, each faculty member reads every student's essay answers and evaluates each student's short oral response to a randomly picked question. After the examination, faculty meet to average their assigned grades.

Although labor intensive, the collaborative grading of students work provides what the faculty and students consider a fair means of assessment, and the cumulative feedback appears to be helpful to the students. For the faculty members, the process of collaboration in itself is a learning experience, often providing the catalyst for spontaneous discussions of different perspectives and philosophies of grading and evaluation. In addition, the necessity for meeting provides opportunities to socialize and to develop a community of scholars.

Faculty Evaluations

Both formal and informal evaluation of the faculty members are conducted. There is almost constant informal feedback from students about the performance of the faculty in general and about individual faculty members. Students are aware that their input is considered, and they appreciate the attention given their concerns. In addition, faculty members give each other feedback on a particular lecture or class session, and when appropriate, adjustments are made to improve the course.

At the end of the semester students formally evaluate each faculty member on the standard evaluation forms for the UHWO and LCC faculty. Indications are that faculty members receive higher evaluations of their teaching in the learning community than in some of their regular classes. The learning community environment seems to bring out the best in faculty as well as students. Students rate faculty significantly higher than usual on items that indicate that the instructors compel students to raise their performance standards. For instance, in these evaluations, students indicate that the learning community requires more reading than most courses, that the subject matter is more difficult, and that it takes more effort to meet requirements.

Course Evaluations

After teaching the course for three semesters, faculty still see room for improvement: the learning community could be structured so that more time is spent on writing process rather than so much time on content; teachers could collaborate more frequently outside of class and more smoothly in class; teachers, and especially the project director, should be provided with released time; and the learning community could be assessed by an external evaluator.

Faculty's overall evaluation of the course, however, indicates a highly successful learning community. All of the faculty participants have agreed that the learning community itself is a transformative experience. One professor stated in class, "I'll never teach the same way again." The faculty members have improved their own teaching by observing each other teach. And they have expressed the hope that such learning communities could become a part of the curriculum. One

of the strongest indications of faculty support for the learning community course is that each of the original six participating faculty members has volunteered to teach the course a second or third time, despite not having released time to engage in the labor-intensive preparation and implementation of the course. Four of the original six faculty have taught the course each of the three times it was offered; the other two have taught it twice. And every participating faculty member has evaluated the experience positively.

Students have also given both oral and written assessments of the overall content and process of the learning community. In addition, they have evaluated the delivery of skills areas.

In their oral assessments, students repeatedly indicate that the course has formed strong communities among students: students network outside of class as well as in class. Students also report that they learn how much more effective collaborative learning is rather than competitive learning.

At the end of each semester, students write open-ended evaluations to five questions:

1. What did you enjoy most about this course? Why?
2. What did you enjoy least about this course? Why?
3. What was the most significant thing you learned?
4. How was the course most successful in helping you learn?
5. How could the course be improved?

Students indicate that they most enjoy the lively class discussions, the interactions between students and professors, and the sense of community formed in class.

From the lively discussions and interdisciplinary approach of the class, they seem to have learned most about tolerance and understanding for other individuals, as well as all races and cultures. A few students have also stated that the guest speakers were among the best features of the class.

The major complaints of students in the Fall 1997 course were that there were no field trips, which had been advertised; there was too much work, especially reading; and there was not enough time for each instructor to focus on a particular topic. As a result of these and other student observations, instructors scheduled two field trips for the Spring 1998 course, cut down the amount of reading slightly, provided more time for lectures and group work on writing, conducted more classes with desks arranged in circles rather than rows, and allowed for students to receive three letter grades for the nine credits instead of just one.

These changes appear to have improved the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the course. Although students in Spring 1998 still complained about the excessive workload, the open-ended evaluations were more positive. When asked how the course could be improved, five students stated unequivocally that there was nothing to improve about the course. One student wrote: "The structure of this course was conducive to deeper learning and critical thinking. I feel that I got more out of this class than any other college level course I have ever taken. Thank you for creating this community."

The results of the assessment of delivery of skills areas also reflect an improvement in teaching effectiveness from Fall 1997 to Spring 1998. For these

evaluations, students were asked to indicate how well the course helped them to learn critical thinking, oral, and written skills. Each student ranked 24 questions on a scale of 1 to 5, with t designating "excellent." The mean scores in the Spring 1998 evaluations were higher on 22 out of 24 items than they were in Fall 1997: in Fall 1997, the means were 4.0 or better for 15 items; in Spring 1998, the means were 4.0 or better for 23 items.

These scores were significantly higher on the items measuring how well students learned writing skills. In Fall 1997, of the nine questions assessing how well the course taught writing skills, only two scored a mean of 4.0 or above; however, in Spring 1998, nine questions scored a mean of 4.0 or above. The most dramatic increase was in the mean scores for the question asking how well the course helped students improve their grammar, spelling, and mechanics: in Fall 1997, the mean score was a 3.46; in Spring 1918, the mean score was a 4.50, a difference of more than one point. Whereas in Fall 1997, only 54% of the students thought the instructors did a good or excellent job of teaching grammar, spelling, and mechanics, in Spring 1998, 87.5% thought they did a good or excellent job. The results also indicate improvement in the faculty's ability to teach students how to choose language, style, and organization appropriate for a particular written communication; develop a main idea clearly with appropriate content; revise and edit; and develop a personal voice in written communication.

These same evaluations also asked students to identify one activity that most helped them improve each of the three targeted skills areas. Students in the Fall 1997 course indicated that the most helpful critical thinking activities were

what they described as the "torturous" philosophical and logic exercises Dr. Williamson conducted in class: eight of the twenty four students responding listed those exercises as the most helpful. Although one-third of the students in Spring 1998 also indicated those exercises were most helpful, seven out sixteen students stated that class discussions were most beneficial in learning critical thinking skills. This response may indicate that using more class sessions with the students seated in circles made the environment more conducive to thoughtful discussions. In addition, more students in Spring 1998 than those in Fall 1997 indicated that class discussions were important activities for developing oral communication skills. More attention to group work also seemed to yield positive results: whereas students in Fall 1997 believed that journal writing was most helpful in teaching them writing skills, students in Spring 1998 stated that group work was the most effective for teaching those skills.

Overall, faculty and student evaluations of the learning community experience have been highly favorable. And students who have enrolled in the learning community course have done so largely on the recommendation of students who previous took the course. This continuing support indicates student satisfaction with the experience.

THE FUTURE

The results of this first inter-campus learning community have been so successful that project participants wish to broaden the involvement at UHWO and LCC, encourage the participation of other campuses within the UH system, and institutionalize the learning communities as a permanent part of the UH general

education program. Consequently, Dr. Rebecca Lee and Douglas Dykstra, Assistant Dean at LCC, and a principal author of the initial NEH grant proposal, have submitted another NEH proposal for a $250,000 grant to subsidize additional learning communities focusing on ecology, gender, and peace. These learning communities will incorporate distance learning technology to link classes within the multi campus UH system and to plan joint service learning projects.

Participants also hope through these efforts to recruit a larger circle of colleagues into the development of interdisciplinary and learner-centered curricular projects. Educators through the UH System need to be informed of the benefits of such learning communities, which foster community and provide wonderful opportunities for teaching and learning. As one of the faculty participants said of the pioneer UHWO-LCC learning community experience: "This is the most exciting educational experience of my long academic career. I don't want to go back to the old ways of teaching, and I hope we can develop more of these wonderful educational experiences for our students."

Appendix A

General Education Skill Standards

CRITICAL THINKING

1. Identify and state problems, issues, arguments, and questions contained in a body of information.

2. Identify and analyze assumptions and underlying points of view relating to an issue or problem.

3. Formulate research questions that require descriptive and explanatory analyses.

4. Recognize and understand multiple modes of inquiry, including investigative methods based on observation and analysis.

5. Evaluate problem, distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant facts, opinions, assumptions, issues, values, and biases.

6. Apply problem-solving techniques and skills, including the rules of logic and logical sequence.

7. Synthesize information from various sources, drawing appropriate conclusions.

8. Communicate clearly and concisely the methods and results of logical reasoning.

9. Reflect upon and evaluate their thought processes, value systems, and world views in comparison to those of others.

ORAL COMMUNICATION

1. Identify and analyze the audience and purpose of any intended communication.

2. Gather, evaluate, select, and organize information for the communication.

3. Use language, techniques, and strategies appropriate to the audience and occasion.

4. Speak clearly and confidently, using the voice, volume, tone, and articulation appropriate to the audience and occasion.

5. Summarize, analyze, and evaluate oral communications and ask coherent questions as needed.

6. Use competent oral expression to initiate and sustain discussions.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

1. Use writing to discover and articulate ideas.
2. Identify and analyze the audience and purpose for any intended communication.
3. Choose language, style, and organization appropriate to particular purposes and audiences.
4. Gather information and document sources appropriately.
5. Express a main idea as a thesis, hypothesis, or other appropriate statement.
6. Develop a main idea clearly and concisely with appropriate content.
7. Demonstrate master of the conventions of writing, including grammar, spelling, and mechanics.
8. Demonstrate proficiency in revision and editing.
9. Develop a person voice in written communication.

APPENDIX B

Faculty Schedule for Course Content

THE STRUCTURE OF COMMUNITIES

Tuesday, February 3

Time	Instructors/ Speakers	Topics/ Activities	Assignments
9:30-10:45	*Bob Linda	Structural Features of Community	**Paper #1** Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration"
Break		Don takes papers to duplication	
11:00-12:15	*Pat Rebecca	Assign oral presentation: "Description and Evaluation of the Structure of a Particular Community" Group Work: The Structure of this Learning Community	Journal entry New Worlds: Lucille Clifton, "in the inner city," p. 51; Elena Padilla, "Migrants: Transients or Settlers?" p. 95
1:30-2:45	*Don Gailynn	Assign next journal entry: Their Family as Community	"Yes, the love of god is best. . . The Oneida Community," Identity, pp. 130-134

Tuesday, March 3

Time	Instructors/ Speakers	Topics/ Activities	Assignments
9:30-10:45	*Rebecca Linda	Asian Tradition How to read poetry Discussion of journal assignment: line-by-line analysis of "On the Subway"	New Worlds: Cervantes, "Freeway 280," p. 42; Cerenio, "We Who Carry," p. 221; Song, "Lost Sister," p. 511; Kono, "Sashimi," p. 638; Mora, "Immigrants," p. 764
11:00-12:15	**Juliet Kono** All *Rebecca	Poetry reading	Journal entry
Lunch	All *Rebecca	Faculty lunch with Juliet Kono	
1:30-2?45	**Eric Flower** *Don Pat	Using the library for research	**Final day for topics to be approved**